POETRY QUARTERLY

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CONTENTS

EDITORIAL	*page* 3
HENRY TREECE	
Three Pleas, The Dilemmas	4
OSCAR WILLIAMS	
Desire	5
KATHLEEN RAINE	
The Crystal Skull	6
Eros	7
E. O. SIGLER	
Two Variations on Themes by Fred Marnau	
I Love Song	8
II Lullaby	9
PETER URE	
In the Course of New Time	10
JON WHITE	
'With the augmentation of the Indies . . .'	13
JAMES KIRKUP	
Remember, Verisimilitudes	14
NICHOLAS MOORE	
The Golden Swordfish	16
Nothing and the Living	17
SEÁN JENNETT	
Old Joyce	18
PATRICIA LEDWARD	
Hands	19

JOHN BAYLISS
Sonnet for Clare page 20
PAMELA PHILLIPS
Poem 20
CLIVE SANSOM
I am a Leaf . . . 21
R. CROMBIE SAUNDERS
The Self-Loved 21
DEREK STANFORD
Poem for Two who Sailed by Night 22
MARGARET STANLEY-WRENCH
The Landscape in the Mind 23
ORMOND THOMAS
Poem in February 24
Bright Candle, My Soul 25
JOHN HEATH-STUBBS
The Lament of Tristan 26
DENISE LEVERTOFF
Two Poems 27
CHRISTOPHER LEE
In Cornwall 28
VALENTIN IREMONGER
Poem 29
J. HARDIMAN SCOTT
Poetry Smoulders in the Ashes 30
ITHELL COLQUHOUN
Triad 31
DENYS VAL BAKER
Song 32

REVIEWS 33

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EDITORIAL

In this fourth year of the war POETRY QUARTERLY still carries on its work of printing the young and the nameless poet and those whose work does not appeal to the reigning cliques. It is, in fact, the only magazine to have appeared regularly throughout the war. Our materially increased circulation reflects the reviving interest in poetry after a dark time of silence. Two years ago GWP was the first to publish an anthology containing the work of young unknown writers most of whom today have made a name for themselves. This year we are promised a very large number of them, some only withheld from immediate circulation by the painful progress of the now almost mythical binder, some in the press, others still in the minds of hopeful compilers. Such collections give the poet's work a more permanent place than periodical publication, and are more popular with the public than first books containing poems unselected by the critical eye of the editor.

In his introduction to the poetry section of the new SELECTED WRITING Mr. Henry Treece has some interesting things to say about the poems he has chosen. He sees in them the evidence of a new Romanticism, a reaction to the preceding generation of poets. Most of them unknown to each other, they do not constitute a clique, but form a fairly broad cross section of the younger writers today. No better words could be found to describe the poems we print in POETRY QUARTERLY. There is evidence that this interesting development in English letters is being watched in America in a letter recently received from the American poet Oscar Williams, one of whose poems appears in this issue. Poets, he writes, tend less in America to fall into groups. Nevertheless it is very apparent that the same reaction against the absorption of the writer into mechanistic totalitarianisms of one kind or another is taking place across the Atlantic. We are experiencing the revolt of the heart against the imbecilities, crazy systems and faulty leadership of the head. The heart is an all important and kingly organ which lives on sometimes for many days after the extinction of the other parts of the stricken body. Much more it is a symbol standing for something that differentiates man from the animal and the machine. It is a symbol of Christian feeling that the world is so much in need of today.

HENRY TREECE

Three Pleas

Stand by me, Death, lest these dark days
Should hurt me more than I may know;
I beg that if the wound grows sharp
You take me when I ask to go.

Step closer, Love, and dry your eyes,
What's marred you'll never mend by tears;
Let's finish where the tale began
And kiss away the ruined years.

A moment, Faith, before you leave,
There's one last favour I would ask;
Put to some use your handsome hand
And show me the face behind your mask.

The Dilemmas

Through the dark curtain of desire
Leaps the white avenging sword,
Passion's assassin, like blood in a fire
Blossoms as accusing word.

Should deed be done, or thought be dared,
The uncaged fury of the heart
Like subtly exquisite bird
Would blood his beak ere scream could start.

Yet should the book be left unread,
The door unlatched, who'd dare defy
And face from sterile unshared bed
The future's pale unblinking eye?

OSCAR WILLIAMS

Desire

Desire is a flower looking
The great empty sky in the eye
Searching in vain for that sign
Of good will, a drop of rain;
Though leaves like tethered birds
Fly off without ever leaving,
And fields are blazing their way
To the horizon, it is in vain.

In vain the white bee of the air
Is skiing on the glassiest space,
For stalking the sun in his slowly
Lengthening step with care
That flowerstalk more delicate
Than a cherub's eyelash is turning
Eyeing a million miles of light
With one small pitiful stare.

On the slenderest of all stalks
It follows the revolving source
As faith's mountains shift their toes
At the running fields of grain;
The landscape like a tremendous disk
Is rushing by and spinning
To meet the mirage of windfalls,
The raillery of the rare rain.

KATHLEEN RAINE

The Crystal Skull

1

All that will remain
is the fire
that kindled the heart.

The snow on my love's shoulders
will melt in air
like rose fading into night.

All that will be remembered
is snow
on a falling star.

All that will remain
is desire
returning to God.

2

All that will be remembered
is that the sun
became the heart,

All that will be remembered
is man
consumed by the sun,

All that will remain
is what the heart remembers
of the sun,

All that will remain
is love
kindling in the night.

Eros

Day rings like a bell
Rising in me, rising,
Salt and bitter as gall
The tears of life, the fountain—
Having life, I have all
the white and trembling sky
shattered into a rainbow,
spilled in an upturned eye
pours the erotic trance
and blind and gold, the angel
of love moves me to stillness
while the dove passes
in unendurable flight
of darkness through every sense,
the seed, the pouring wings,
The sole magnificat
rings in my mouth, sings
in waves of conscious light—

> There is no more than this
> our daily bread, our weeping
> bleeding and worshipping heart—

E. O. SIGLER

Two Variations on Themes by Fred Marnau

I. LOVE SONG

'Der Wind trägt rote Schuh' und tanzt
Im späten Blättertreiben. . . .'

The wind is dancing in red shoes
in the late scurrying of leaves.
Everywhere lurks in the autumnal park
knowledge of our loss.

We have forgotten the roses
and the high summer grass
is cut and a grey net
drapes the moon as it rises.

Here by the fairy child
the grace of a fawn
lies heavy on you, and years ago
there was spring. I am old.

Learning the loneliness in our lives
by the craters in early darkness:
my love, do not tire when the bare
trees mourn for their leaves.

II. LULLABY

'*Er lockt euch an, ach, schauet nicht heraus.*'

Do not look outside or name your price:
through the storm and the rain
the floods will carry your house
according to plan.

Promenade slowly from corner to corner,
wait, wait for the ghosts to come in.
But tell of your dreams and you're done for,
one step outside, you drown.

Listen and wait. Your roof shall not fail,
moonrise no longer menace.
And in the quiet you shall
remember his smiling face.

And with the red of morning
will come a hallowing calm,
after years of longing
the peaceful time.

PETER URE

In the Course of New Time

In the course of new time
The crystal breaks and forms,
The chalk and beach proclaims
The multitude of storms,
Age and death that give
Passion to our love.

Upon the heath in autumn
The just and happy grass
Runs singing to the wind,
The estuary like glass
And all the trees shining.
Not this, not this, but only
An eye—a cliff indeed—
A hand like sand wrinkled,
But different, but different.

For hard, erect, the shoulder,
And no streams irrigate
The breast, nor sea-worn boulder
The sheltering skull.
We dare not move like trees,
More conscious than the birds,
We watch the swirling rivers
The rocks we cannot be.
Speaking of praise and judgement,
In time immured like bones,
Despotic and impotent,
Weeping like giants, alone.

But by the lake's brim
Object and mirror dance,
Great swans circulate,
Their snowy breasts advance.
And here the image hangs
Between the hill and shore,
That we enjoy this power:
Created images run
Out of the blossoming crowns,
Out of the foaming mouth
That rings the feet of downs.
How shall our thoughts arise
Save that great Thought bless,
Swan, lake, heart survive
Unless that Image stand,
All natural objects seen
Reflections of that gaze,
And spiritual images stored
A heart-long summer make,
Since every act's proclaimed
A point where God's adored?

But yet, but yet the ice.
Cages the summer up,
On the deserted reaches
The swans no longer sweep,
The crystal breaks and forms
And, passionate, we love
Because death and the storms
Have struck the flowering grove.
He sent long letters to us
But grief has made us blind
And all the waters show us
Is Time with Judgement crowned.

O teach this bitter mystery
That we enquire and dread,
Why mirror mocks the image,
The swan is starved or dead.
For Time is loosed upon us,
The heart its storms empowers
With terrible precision
To strike the numbered hours.
The breaking, forming crystal
Has shaken to the root
Confidence and luck.

But this I ask in praise.
The image I have found
Could break Time's power at length,
But chose the swan instead
And in the watery glass
Its image shall repass
When all this winter's fled.

All acts remain undone
All thoughts remain a dream
Until we know this word:
No thought or act will be
Perfected any day.
But the great Image cries
In Time there lies your lot,
But Time is not more real
Than the chalk that breaks
And crumbles into shale.
I give you Time, but give
This Truth to learn
That swan and lake are brought
With joy from my heart
And always to that heart return.

JON WHITE

'*With the augmentation of the Indies. . . .*
(FOR BERENICE)

Trying so hard to read the map of love
and plot a steady course there, could we know
the dirty tracks our eager fingers made
none of our later tears would help remove
to show us where rock hid and palm-tree grew?

Why did we choose to plot with such delight,
considering our progress far too slow,
anxious excursions to uncertain realms?
and, dreaming far apart through some hot night,
at length forget the beating hearts we knew?

How proud we were, excited to discover,
out of our course and in the heat of the day,
terrible countries with tyrannic kings
where in the stormy skies forever hover
the cruel nightingales that never sing!

And hard was the horizon we clambered over.
We did not get there by a path on the map.
All we found at last were trees without sap,
plains grey, no grass and clover, and over all
a dying sun. We had not expected it at all.

Neither did we feel any more like lovers.
So all we look for now is a march without cover
into that solitude. We must steer by the stars
and move more carefully and go alone
without a willing song in the wheeling blood

and learn enough to make our wanderings good.

JAMES KIRKUP

Remember

FOR W. J. L.

Remember our darkness. Remember
the hollow wilderness, the desert of our aims,
the one wish, and the restricted men
that followed after us with fallen arms
and silent voice.

Remember too the darkness of the years
that brought us slowly closer:
out of the waiting crowd that watches for a kiss,
out of the dungeons where we stood alone,
and could not rise

above the prisoners who held our chains
with iron hands, and would not let us go.

They follow still, we are observed together,
no longer lost, but wandering extensively upon
the night's protective arm.
We are not yet alone. Remember
those who are still lost, the ones we leave behind,
the ones whom none have found.

Verisimilitudes

His gesture, a mere
system,
his reply
a mirror that ceases somewhere,
a horizontal effort,
manifest

I am the same
the self of some
brief re-instatement
a rich newcomer,
merciless,
versatile as iron

I have resumed
the alibi of sex
and wandered on the imperceptible
lips of the headland.
Or seated in the vestige of a room
I have remained
a diagram

Upon a vista
I have flung my gloves
with eloquence, but no one else
was quite so understanding
and my hands became
elderly

the rings,
buttons in the flesh
that bud vaguely on the knuckle,
burst painlessly and are diamonds
the fertile jewellery that bulges
under the glove of flesh.

I am about to enter on a sphere,
a necklace, a procession,
an uncontrollable rebirth,
phantom and earth.

NICHOLAS MOORE

The Golden Swordfish

Departing upon a journey in the angry morning
Of golden sunlight, when the breeze whispers
'Stay, stay in the golden sun', what wheels
Revolve in the stubborn head, repeating 'On
To the impossible waves where the golden swordfish
Plays and gallops in his shoals, a gay holiday'.

Lady, if we, being impertinent professors
Of the gentle, have ourselves to defend
Now that we imagine swordfishes of splendour:
What defence can you bring for your touch?
Why, embroiled in an angry man's war, speak,
Brilliant as you are, against brilliant images?

Yes, it is true. We shall all disappear in the dark,
With no spark of enlightenment upon our tombs,
Our crass, pale faces buried in the dust.
What then is this departure? Where do we,
Taking our seats in the big train, fit in?
This scheme of things is not possible: nor the bright swordfish.

However the sunlight undoubtedly beams invitation:
'Lazy girl, lazy boy, stay here. Do not move.
There is no movement will get you anywhere
But to lie basking upon the stranded shore'.
The imagery of the swordfish is not fitting:
We must dance, we must sing, but never write a poem.

Departure. The crammed platforms, the swaying crowds
Waiting for the whistle, and the monstrous train
Filing in with its serpents of carriages.
Where to can we be carried this bright day?
Look at the sun speaking upon fluid colours
Of dahlia and hollyhock: green the grass, cool the air.

However undoubtedly no invitations move us,
But the desire to be moving, to go
Vastly and crass through the happy valleys, singing
With the speed of the wheels. Undoubtedly
We shall finally build ourselves a magnificent tomb
And on it inscribe an emblematic golden fish.

Nothing and the Living

You will see there, if ever to that land you dare to go,
Museum pieces, derelict wastes of thought,
And those who thought them and collected them
Will long be gone, where Nothing rules the roost,
A clarion cock among the hens of disaster:

You will hear crow in the distance beyond the rainbow
A carillon of art, a beat of silver-
Throated music, such as seems most strange
To those who, like you, wander in museums:
This crowing will be just the voice of Nothing.

It will so affright you that you stay
No longer than you must among the dusty
Relics of a perilous age. For Nothing
Will have a voice stranger and more beautiful than
The voices of the past you know as disaster.

O the bright hens! You will remember then
The incongruous chatter of old men, leaders
Of politics and poetry and countries, and you
Will recognise them under Nothing's thumb,
When you yourself have Everything, and live.

SEAN JENNETT

Old Joyce

I am broken by the tumult of the years:
on me they bend the fury of their anger,
the iron of their hate. I have watched them,
watched them rise and have their flood of summer,
and watched them fall through the dry autumn evil
and lie among the slush and sludge of winter,
the dead end of time. And I have wept
because they passed so quickly, wept although
not one but brought me agony and shame,
not one but brought me loss and bitterness,
failure and humiliation.

I remember
how one girl turned her back, and how another
mocked me for the thinness of my wrist,
or perhaps because I would not join the dance—
I had some other things to think of.
And men talked of me, and at times despised me,
and I have never understood. Their laughter
was not my way, nor did I hope for it.
To-morrow was my constant care. My plans
were all built on the promise of to-morrow,
and I looked forward to my golden dawn.

Even the dead are not so lonely at heart
as I am guarded by these eighty years.

I grow too old now for a fresh endeavour.
I cannot cuddle with a pretty girl
among the bracken or along the river;
I cannot dance or sing, forget myself—
my dignity becomes so hard a shell—
I cannot join with the uproarious crew
I sometimes meet at Christmas in a street.
I am too old now; I have lost it all.

Even the dead are not so poor of heart
as I, the heir of all my eighty years.

Sometimes, I think, I am the lusty lion,
sometimes the agile rabbit in the meadow,
sometimes the bird whose note shakes all the wood:
but this old mummy fails, these crooked limbs,
this shrivelled fist of heart, my scrannel pipes,
even desire.
I might have played the lover once,
have played it out, and with success
have forced a sweet surrender.
But not now.

These eighty counters, all the wage I won—
I wish that I could drop them in a cap
close by some barbarous scrawl,
or in a blind man's cup.
Too late. My fortune is invested in the grave.

PATRICIA LEDWARD

Hands

At last I have died and can sink back and lie in blackness
And dim silence.
There shall I sleep—and sleeping dream, veil upon veil of night
Enfolding me and soothing tenderly the sounds of strife.

To sleep—and sleeping dream away the old, sad wars in stillness
And dark distance—
Until my heart stirs to your hand and one small ray of light
Is born, and timidly a moon throws shadows on the rim of life.

JOHN BAYLISS

Sonnet for Clare

The night-sky half-Italian, with its star
bright in the west, betokens the one hope
we save for children, and for me one child;
whether in cradle, or as we imagine her,
painfully climbing up the spiral stair,
who take the risen moon to be her shield,
the hills her guardians, and the gradient slope
her living journey to the heavenly lair.

I cynic hope this prove to be no liar—
the peaceful angel by her growing bed
leaning above her with great crown of fire,
but rather trust in her fair mother's head
gentle in darkness as the softest leaves
bending to touch the littlest of her loves.

PAMELA PHILLIPS

Poem

Out of a young darkness, pausing in flight
In a black cloud the night-birds fly
Slowly breasting the silent hill-crest
Slaked lime wings pressed on the dying sky.

Out of the mouth of the thunder-bed
The torn year tossed into the barren land
Crumbles and dies in the desert earth
To the song of a strange wind stirring the sand.

Where the sleeping summer hibernates
The darkness hardens imperceptibly
Cracked where recreative thunder strikes
Beyond the swooping valley lost in the sea.

CLIVE SANSOM

I am a Leaf . . .

I am a leaf the wind
  stirs, or forgets to stir;
irresolute and blind
  as a child on a dark stair.

But as wind wakes in leaves
  a music not the wood's,
some seldom spirit drives
  and rounds me into words;

and as the child who stands
  foot-held, fear-torn,
finds his imagined bonds
  lifted and faith return—

I, in doubt's dream of death,
  have known that spirit's power,
the poet's inward truth
  that conquers all despair.

R. CROMBIE SAUNDERS

The Self-Loved

You talk with crowds and walk in crowded rooms
And act as though your death were any man's,
Knowing it never was so near at hand
And that the wound was never quite the same.

And still within your brain the hammers fall
Upon the minutes of a private time;
And voices cannot penetrate your smile,
And emptiness grows round you like a shell.

DEREK STANFORD

Poem for Two who Sailed by Night

You were a promise in those grey-ribbed days
when earth drew aching breath through iron lungs;
the landscape like an operating table,
awaiting that bleak surgeon of the snow
with anæsthetic death for all desire.
You were a promise in the year's white Lent.

Or should I say the clippers of the wind
close-cropped the pavement's frozen adamant,
and razored raw the cheeks of passers-by,
flaying them as the winter knife cuts carrots.
And yet in you I walked down vista-d streets
lit with the trembling chequer of paper lanterns.

The evening sky's presentiment
before the first star's limitation;
a blue bowl on a window-ledge
whose black sail hatches a hyacinth;
a wet day lifting to a close
with gutters' fitful gold reflections.

Travelling the tunnel of February—
this No-Man's month, fag-end of winter—
between hard death and cruel beginning,
there grows a subterranean glitter,
stray music filtered over water.

Flair for creating curves of living
that instincts trace like the wheeling skater
who weaves his fine electric circles:
this grace the traveller enchanted.

So meeting the Mind, smelt violets
and longed to touch them with an answering breeze,
and Body, flying the flag of piracy,
alongside lost its damned identity,
and there were just two dark embracing keels,
and masts that swayed together in a storm;
or like two signposts at some far cross-road
fall together in a flurry of wind
upon a shapeless night of driving rain.

MARGARET STANLEY-WRENCH

The Landscape in the Mind

I may not return to the country in the mind
the blue-as-juniper hills, the pleasant landscape
which I have ordered and planned, with trees and water,
water moving bright under branches to escape
beyond, beyond. . . . The trees are felled, the star
disfigures fair woods, the hill through rain is blind.

The hope scarcely spoken, the breathless possibility
a word has killed, the action, not to that end,
has shattered the bright world, the green has lost
a little of its lustre now, the planned
future is inverted, lost, like a child who missed
the familiar road, yet goes on hopelessly.

Yet on some word as trivial, the flashed eye
of a friend, the unspoken thought, another world
will be built up, fresh lanes for thought to tread
lured by honeysuckle and the wild rose's furled
and candid petal, until this landscape spread
in field and wood becomes reality.

ORMOND THOMAS

Poem in February

Walking besides the lank sea-shore in February
with the faint birdmarks, triangular,
and the grave curl and cry of the whirlpool bay,
I set a line the wave cannot destroy,
wave turning upon the dunes, beyond the rock
first searched and sought out by the renewing tide
that leaves no hidden sanctuary.

The line is valid as a winter dream; upon no rack of logic,
under the print of nails, proving some non-existence
of a spirit by a manrib cracking before pain;
it is no wreck of a ghostship on the shore,
gone in the daylight, only there in moon;

so when the reedwinds come to seek me out
my hair is seagrass, fingers sand,
and over all the watermarks they pass;
there is no enemy; here is friend.

The slender sun combing the gray hair's cloud
drops the insistent shadow on the distant castle;
broken like bone. Yet on the beach the skull's no alien,
and the black woods around above witness no burial
of the dead seas. They are not alone

for under them all and the leafmoulds, and the waters
through the late winter boughs, and under the stones,
the skull and I are handlocked like a flood,
a flood in February when first the primrose breaks.

Bright Candle, My Soul

Bright candle, my soul of steel
break through the edges of the failures past;
reflect, now the loud wind and rain
have blown so far into the receptive land
all light in the dark direction
we have come, conquered,
yet somehow failed.

Break love, as credit slowly;
wither the will of the doomed;
love, break in a straighter forward wheel.
Come, patient as the sower
on the stone ground, dream not.
Whiten you knuckles if your new will
turn face in any weird light, but walk
walk steadily and do not wane.

In your deep homes you feel it; the pen
wriggles a song in any hand, but
feel the diamond in the earth's dull centre
and light will break through any rock of paper.

You feel its blood, for it is forever there.
It is the tooth's nerve, the lover's clean eye,
the fingernail's growing and the fingers
lifting bread to a mouth. It is the green river.

Bright candle, my soul of steel
break through the edges of the failures past;
reflect on the strings of winter lace;
rivenreeds' hair, my snow, delicate
fair shoulder towards the firm cold,
foot in the white, lined furrow,
ear to the field's side's song.

Take the skull's sky and weave
black branches winter lace;
take gray veins' labyrinth
sharpening the ancient mountain,
pointing the myth.

Burn clear, send on
all glances through a purer prism.

JOHN HEATH-STUBBS

The Lament of Tristan

Between granite and alabaster
  The cold seas run;
Continually, with heavy finger,
  The grey winds thrum
Upon the cordage that thews the ship
That hales me from my heart.

May was the season of sweetness,
  The briar rose in the lane,
The shrill brown bird and many, many
  Folded flowers, but May brings
No softness to the spray, to the hard stems
Of sea-lavender, rosemary.

DENISE LEVERTOFF

Two Poems

I

Swan turning downstream drew, intent and cold,
daylight in its monumental wake;
evening an echo's question, frosted web,
a wreath of darkness hung on stony boughs,
a lake of air, where fortune's vague tomorrow
held my wondering hand without a word.
I hear irresolute footsteps cross the plains of the sea
fathoms below; a thousand feathers falling
caress the dazzling soliloquies of dark with dark,
ravished intricacies of an hour's
final rallentando.
Life is the verge, the silence
said, of love's
immense ravine.

II

Living ghosts are dials, or are vast shadows
Of warning in the antlered east, or lie,
Tall silent fallen towers, in deserts harbouring
The fugitive angry sun, a captive fire;
Are sober strangers at the festival,
Mendicant with relics of the rose,
Rufous stain upon the sheet of peace.
The flicker of a bright Icarian wing
Alone can fade these phantoms out of air,
Burning the fuel of terrestrial fear.
Delaying at wayside shrines, I seek a route
To some impulsive wise Jerusalem,
The oiled and subtle lock of this great key,
Unhaunted country of the final poem.

CHRISTOPHER LEE

In Cornwall

Tremor through total darkness, felt but hidden,
noise in the night, drowning any other;
only, loneliest sound, this water
pounds past the millwheel, streaming down to sea:
a creak and throb and rocking all night long.

But the quiver
glancing shiver ash-grey and sudden
of first glimmering light on slipping water,
on wheel and swirl and stream
emerging, seen,
taking on green and then its other colours;

running at last in clear sun
from tinted gravel and lip of drawn glass
past rumbling wheel to the broken tumble below
and smoothed-out glint to coast.

The wheel I watched was power and human daring
and behind me an arduous,
so hard a journey, revealed now as wasted
and in front, therefore, what bitter journeys waited;

but yesterday was already slipping down
past the wheel and away, and another
frail dawn would gradually show
this wheel before that other mill could grind;

meanwhile remained the mystery
and the sun on free and bound, on ground and tree;
the springing turf on cliff,
the thrift, the unclouded blue:
remained a world of what the eye sees,
what the eye sees and the heart sometimes grieves for.

VALENTIN IREMONGER

Poem

Red-faced, with cauliflower hands,
With the thin eyes of the idle-gazing
Needling me, stripped I stand,
Tears troubling me daily.

The moons in my eyes wane not.
I am afraid of my mother.
The stone she gave me I forgot:
—She loves not you; another.

She accepted my love like a bouquet,
Then ripped it, flung it down.
I thought she was joking.
I laughed; then quietly down,

Down in my breast a cat curled
And claws stretched to my heart's strings.
Everywhere eyes began
To focus me in their visioning.

I am a mountainous size.
On pedestal, awkward, alone I stand,
Red-faced, with cauliflower eyes
And a tear in my hand.

J. HARDIMAN SCOTT

Poetry Smoulders in the Ashes

He stands proud of the year's undertakings,
Glancing through the poetry of the age—
Machine's faster output, gun's greater range,
Plane's lean armed wing to curdle clouds with blood,
And turbine turning steel limbs of power,
Uncuriously not generating Love.

Tenderer become the human tissues,
Machines tendons tighten, for the issues
Are not in life, but in the steady stalking
Of giant talking things, whose blood is oil,
Whose wife is perpetual motion towards
Undetermined, indeterminate lords.

Arms that wear thin the constant shining bones
Can stutter sparks and turn from flame new limbs,
Snatch the foetus from the furnace; midwives
Bear the clean, new adult to workshop ward
For the piston marathon; and smoke breathes
Down where other bones break between brick walls.

No medicine in the dispensary
Can do more than attempt a cure, and where
Prevention lies is never figured in
The balance sheet or shareholders' profits:
The dividend is wheels end in winding,
The vacant park with seats chipping paint,
Birds chirping on iron trees, and perhaps
The litter basket with a charred Shakespeare.

But sometimes he curtsies to the struggling
For camera's eye to wink flattery
And show that even the great are 'human',
Buying violets from a flower seller,
Or a penny slipped in the urchin's hand—
The condescending smile and rare favour.

The truth that burns in the furnace, in meal
Of metal mounting, near moulding on hearts,
In flake of flame weaning adult machine,
Is the one necessity of function.
Values flare grostesque in flame of foundry
And twist the need of action into steel.

The poetry smoulders in the ashes,
Casting mechanic's shadow into shade,
Focussing light about swirling centre,
Like blue-bossed burning of propeller blade,
Spinning into powerful air the sparks
Of human entity scratching metal
With pin-point fire, finding the naked marks
Noting ore's origin, and breaking Love
On ribs of steel, the rough rack ends of Life.

ITHELL COLQUHOUN

Triad

In a valley filled with sub-tropical vegetation there were three trees of the cypress family, one at each corner.

I called out to the other giants, how the air of the valley changed a little way below the tip of my cypress, how above this it became clear as the voice of a bird, and here was first touched by sunlight.

I picked the middle cypress, that marked the defile leading southwards to the sea, noticing that the fronds at its tip were slightly silvered.

DENYS VAL BAKER

Song

I

For thus, long long ago, these things were; thus it was and shall be, as it is written in sands and engrained in the heart. Once, when the sun smiled, but now its smile is the cold artificial gleam of fluorescent lamps. Once, when the flowers bloomed, but now their blooms are dead petals in a shopping street. Once, when the birds sang, but now their songs are lonely sounds among the woods and hills. Thus it was and shall be, the meaning that is missing, the beauty that is lost, the reality that is buried; thus it was and shall be, warm in the strong arms of my memory.

II

For memory tells a tale truer than prophecy, and memory is more real than the present. For memory is the cornerstone of all journeys, and the stepping-stone of all searches, and the resting-stone of all endings. For memory is the golden cloud of what has been, and of what was meant, and of what was worth-while, and of what was truth and beauty. For memory is the thin blue flame of the clear eye and the courageous heart and the undying spirit, it is the thin blue flame of an eternity.

III

O, how can the blood that has never flowed passionately have warmth, and how can the body that has never felt pain be alive, and how can the heart that has never loved be a heart? O, how can the eye that has never looked ever see, and how can the ear that has turned away ever hear, and how can the senses that have never experienced be fulfilled? O, how can the will that has never failed ever achieve, and how can the mind that has never learnt ever teach, and how can the spirit that has never suffered ever know happiness? And, O, how deep and how rich and how full is the memory in which these things live.

REVIEWS

JOHN HALL, KEITH DOUGLAS, and NORMAN NICHOLSON, *Selected Poems* (John Bale and Staples), crown 8vo, 78 pages, 2s. 6d.

As far as I know, Wrey Gardiner, with his selection from Alex Comfort, Ian Serraillier, and Roy McFadden, began the idea of publishing three poets together in one volume, and it appears to have proved popular. It is an excellent idea, and so simple I wonder no-one thought of it before. The ordinary anthology does not give enough of the work of each poet to show his ability, and discourages comparison because of the very multiplicity of authors. The trilogy, on the other hand, allows of a really representative selection and encourages critical comparison. Incidentally, it should also form a vehicle by means of which the work of a good poet who has not written enough for a volume of his own can be presented to the public.

All three of the poets in this book are familiar through the magazines that print modern poetry, but none of them has appeared before at this length. The publication of a collection of poems is always a severer test of a poet's work than the printing of a poem or two in a periodical, and these three poets do not come through the ordeal with equal success.

John Hall is certainly the most interesting. Broadly influenced by the metaphysicals, and obviously a reader of Hopkins, he is nevertheless not an imitator. He has developed a strong style, not without subtleties of music and meaning, but he is also capable of tongue-twisters and ugly phrases, as for instance with the birds that

> '*hop where*
> *Crumbled manna speckles moss*
> *And with covetous beaks peck*'

and such Hopkins pastiche as:

> '*Back they come, soon bounce back, in a bouquet of song*'

and baby language: 'the wee popping of buds' (all these are from one poem). He can also write odd phrases that do not mean very much, as 'grass growing like poetry' and 'roots changing their gears'.

Keith Douglas writes in slower, more urbane language, and achieves excellent results with it, as in 'The Prisoner' and 'The Marvel'. Perhaps he never writes with the rush and force of Hall, nor with the same simplicity, but on the other hand he is surer of himself and avoids the bathetic. His poems are mostly nostalgic, often ominous in undertone, and this prevailing mood gives to his work an underlying unity.

I do not find the earlier poems of Norman Nicholson in this selection altogether to my taste, and I assume that they were written earlier in time. They are strongly rhythmical, but monotonously so, and there is a tendency to jingle that not even the use of half-rhymes can altogether obviate. He will, too, use images that are perhaps intended to be original, but succeed only in being grotesque—such as sunlight that is 'like soap-suds on a castle wall' or the reflections on a blackberry that inexplicably remind the poet of the coupons in his ration book. Nor is he always accurate in his statements—'smooth as peeled bark' is nonsense, though one knows what he means; and in the English language what does 'black as raisins' mean? But he is certainly worth reading, first for his delight in the minute details of nature, and more because he is sincere and thoughtful, with a marked religious sense. With 'The Garden of the Innocent' he has achieved a poem of uncommon interest.

Buy this book for its contents—they are worth your two and sixpence; but at that price it might have been better produced. The binding is poor, even for these days, and will not withstand the constant handling that a book of poetry should receive.

SEÁN JENNETT

STEPHEN COATES, *First Poems*; PHILIP SYLVESTER, *Freedom is My Fame* (both Fortune Press, 6s.); EDWIN MUIR, *The Narrow Place* (Faber, 6s.).

These three books have in common that they are all more or less independent of contemporary movements: that is to say, they neither belong to the new realist era fostered by New Writing, nor the New Romantic era fostered by Herbert Read and led by Henry Treece. These poets are thus without category in contemporary literature, though Philip Sylvester has an acute similiarity to the Georgian poets of the last war, and Edwin Muir at times shows a certain kinship to the 'other-worldly' group of Robert Graves and Laura Riding. But they are apart from the dominant stream. Coates and Muir have this in common, that they have an affinity with the prose of Kafka; they inhabit a world of ghostly fears and terrors: the people and landscapes of their poems hold an unknown terror and an unknown hope. But Stephen Coates is the more pessimistic and seems to derive also from the Waste-Land Eliot. Sylvester, on the other hand, is a romantic, and seems to have a deal in common with Oscar Wilde, but his romanticism is less delicate than that of the nineties, more open, less restrained. His technique too is not comparable to that of Dowson or Arthur Symons, there are too many unnecessary, unevocative words; the atmosphere is lacking. He seems a little obsessed with the young (men, I think) in shorts, and with the word 'wildrose' used as an adjective. *Freedom is My Fame* appears to be a selection from many unpublished books he has written, and the theme-poem deals with the idea that the author has 'set his heart on fame', but that his fame remains unknown, his dreams gone, but 'his pride lives on and freedom is his fame'. I'm afraid he will have to tighten up his verse-writing to achieve even a modicum of success, and by success I don't mean newspaper fame. His traditional sonnets might be impressive if they were a little more original and had a bit more to say in them, and if he could leave out this Winny-the-Poo crap about shorts.

Stephen Coates' poems after this are a godsend. They are carefully-wrought, for the most part unexciting, but nonetheless moving. Occasionally the imagery is startling, like bright reflections striking out from a sombre stream. He does not use rhyme much, but his poems are nevertheless a model of formal writing which might well be recommended to the study of some of his more vivacious and better-known contemporaries. This is a good book, though there are one or two poems that might better have been omitted, and I

think it shows more promise for the future than that of any other young poet. There is a quiet mastery about his writing that is most impressive.

Edwin Muir, too, is a very good poet. He also, on the surface, is unexciting. But he is a sure craftsman, and he explores 'the narrow place' in which he works with great artistry and great sincerity. When so many poets are spending their time in vain attempts to be great, it is refreshing to read one who is content to put his talents towards being as good as possible within his chosen limits. However, I think it is rather silly of his publishers to address their blurb to 'lovers of poetry, as distinct from appreciators of novelty or notoriety', because the implication seems to be that readers may find the book dull and unoriginal. This is far from being the case. All the poems, except possibly the first in the book, which has nevertheless a very good conclusion, are completely successful: they are delicate, formal, and some of them filled with a passionate intensity of terror.

> '*If I could hold complete*
> *The reverse side of the pattern,*
> *The wrong side of Heaven,*
> *O then I should know in not knowing*
> *My truth in my error.*'

NICHOLAS MOORE

View, Jan. 1943 (Chas. Henri Ford, 360 E. 55st, N.Y., 50c.); SELWYN SCHWARTZ, *Passages of Refuge* (Decker, $2.50).

This issue of *View* is entitled 'Americana Fantastica'. It has fewer serious artistic pretensions than usual, possibly because European surrealism is far less in evidence than American, and the American surrealists have never escaped a conscious vein of social criticism. The selection of incongruities here is brilliant and amusing—small parts of the jungle we live in are held up for inspection, and curious involuntary meanings are unearthed from children's readers ('It is my ox. Is it up to us? It is no ox. Ha, no ox? It is my ox') and from the free-association which seems to prompt the compilers of type-books. Altogether a talented collection of satire.

Schwartz is an unequal poet, but interesting because he has the perception to follow Hart Crane rather than Whitman. All the

poems are fragmentary, and by English lyrical standards formless, displaying a remarkable fear both of eloquence and of structure. There are even some orthographic remnants of Cummings. The book shows us the other aspect of the madness which *View* mocks —the bewilderment of sensitive minds struggling with the anti-cultural chaos which they wish to reduce to poetry. This is a conflict from which English writers are at present free, since they have no wish to attempt the creation of a national myth, and all their battles are against themselves. One feels that if Schwartz could close the door upon the din, a lyrical impulse would develop and be sustained for more than one line, but in these poems it is submerged perpetually in gusts of extraneous noise.

ALEX COMFORT

JOHN ATKINS, *Experience of England* (Favil Press, 1s.).

John Atkins writes his own criticism in the lines:

'A fly on the water neither sinks nor swims,
But drifts, or lingers in its ring.
So I on the languid wave of a Western pond
Kept all I knew, but added not a thing'.

He restates in his own way what we all know. Because he is honest and unpretentious he writes well within narrow limits, with quiet observation, sensuous pleasure and understanding. Sometimes this understanding fails a little; his poem *London* shocked me with its shallow accusations. For instance:

'There is no life here but the diseased attempt
To simulate vivacity . . .'

This is by no means the truth about London and Londoners.

He has a simple imagination that reminded me of Rupert Brook, particularly in *East Anglia*. The subject of this poem is treated with appreciation and is the most successful of the five.

Here and there are lines that hint at something bigger to come. But the promise is not fulfilled, either because he is afraid of himself, or because he can't yet translate what he sees into words. The booklet is well worth buying however. Atkins' experience of England is interesting and controversial.

PATRICIA LEDWARD

WALTER DE LA MARE, *Songs of Childhood* (Faber, 6s.); IDA GRAVES, *Mother and Child* (Fortune Press); FRANK KENDON, *The Flawless Stone* (C.U.P., 1s.).

Here we have two long poems, one dealing with the love of a mother for her child, the other with the theme that Nature is the art of God. Both are interesting and capably written, but both leave a slight sense of disappointment that more was not achieved.

With Miss Graves this arises from her careful and deliberate weight of description. Her aim is to carve a statue and she succeeds, but the result is sculpture rather than poetry, static rather than dynamic.

Mr. Kendon is more obviously a poet. He writes simply and unaffectedly and his lines linger in the mind, as this sample may show:

> '*Man loves the shape of trees, the touch of flowers,*
> *The bent and well-proportioned swallow's wing,*
> *The jewel eye, the fixed unfalling fountains*
> *Of blossom trees, the silver-armoured fish,*
> *The glitter and tissue of a fly;*'

Yet even here there is something left to be desired. The poet's reaction to his subject is a little too humble, his lyric gift a little too constrained by academic considerations. As the poem was written for the Seatonian Prize perhaps this criticism is rather unfair, for in regard to the usual run of Prize Poems, this one is remarkably good, but one feels that the thought lags behind the poetry of the words, thereby enfeebling them.

Both poems, however, have their merit, that their authors have conscientiously attempted to extend their lyric gift and their achievement is certainly worth the effort and worth reading.

Songs of Childhood contains many of Mr. de la Mare's best poems for children, and, it might be added, their parents. But besides the well-known 'Tartary' and ' The Sleeping Beauty ' (both perfect by adult standards), there is a poem I have not seen before called 'As Lucy went a-walking', which describes how one Christmas Day a small girl saw a witch, how

> '*Her scarlet, buckled shoes they clicked, her heels*
> *a-twinkling high,*
> *With mistletoe her steeple hat bobbed as she went by*

and how a magic garden was conjured up:

> . . . '*in clouds of gold sweet cherry trees upgrow,*
> *And bushes of red roses that bloomed above the snow.*'

Such scenes are only equalled for vividness in the poems of John Keats.

There are endless other examples of his skill. To quote only a few, there is the Lady Caroline beautifully mirrored with hands

'*white in the candleshine*':

the true raven who asks for the yewberries sad lamps to burn for him, and the Prince of Sleep, who wears 'garb, grey of lavender'.

But perhaps the best feature of his poetry is his talent for 'secret laughter' (his own phrase). It is this which preserves that exquisite and delicate balance in his work and prevents it from becoming too precious. In such a poem as 'Bunches of Grapes' we can see him laughing at his own style, and for all his delight in the supernatural he does not forget the human element. Nor would he be led into the error of confusing the two as Barrie did. Influenced by Coleridge, Keats, and Blake to some degree, he has taken only the best from each and transformed what he has taken till it shines with all the altered beauty of a cut diamond. He is not the magpie but the jeweller.

Perhaps the greatest tribute I can pay to him is to point out that as a poet who has never quarrelled with his fellow-writers, he has won and kept the admiration of all the differing schools of poetry and individual poets for twenty years. Even Eliot has not done this, and, like Eliot, he stands alone, the master of his art unparalleled.

JOHN BAYLISS

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